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After Pause, Seoul Renews Crackdown on Dissent

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SEOUL, South Korea — The authoritarian Government of President Chun Doo Hwan has begun a new crackdown on dissidents, with a long string of political arrests, indictments, dismissals and even beatings in the last few months.

Officials insist they have not abandoned "liberalization" policies begun more than a year ago. Nevertheless, foreign diplomats and political analysts say the Government has clearly swung toward a hard line after a period in which it seemed to show a greater tolerance for dissent.

Opponents of President Chun say they fear he may tighten controls still further and possibly even go back to the harsh policies that characterized his Government after he seized power in a military coup five years ago.

Perhaps the most graphic symbol of the latest crackdown is a bill that was drafted in early August to create special "reorientation" centers for South Korean college students judged to be left-wing radicals.

Six Months of 'Guidance'

The detention centers were to operate outside the normal judicial system. Committees of lawyers and professors would determine whether students should be sent away for up to six months of "guidance and enlightenment" on acceptable political behavior.

"Students should not be active in politics," Education Minister Sohn Jae Suk said in an interview. "They should study and prepare themselves for the future."

But the reaction against the proposal was angry and swift.

The chief political opposition party denounced the bill as an "evil law" and pledged to fight against it in the National Assembly. Dissident activists likened the reorientation centers to the "re-education camps" set up in some Communist countries. One young man in the southwestern city of Kwangju immolated himself in protest.

Even members of Mr. Chun's ruling Democratic Justice Party were unhappy. Two prominent critics, one of them the party's legislative floor leader, were replaced.

Bill Withdrawn, but Not Dead

Because of the unexpectedly harsh criticism, the Government soon withdrew the legislation. But officials say the proposal is not dead, and Mr. Sohn warns that it will be reintroduced if student protests surge again this fall.

Demonstrators are not the only Government targets, however.

At the end of August, two senior editors and a reporter for the newspaper

Dong-A Ilbo were detained and beaten by officers of the National Security Planning Agency, formerly known as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. They were picked up after publication of an article the Government considered "diplomatically sensitive." The incident was widely interpreted as a warning to all journalists.

During the summer, the Government branded a student group called Sammintu as pro-Communist, and arrested or charged 86 of its members. Thirteen were charged with violating the severe National Security Law. If convicted they could be sentenced to death.

Students Accused of Spying

Twenty-two other people, most of them students, were arrested this month and accused of belonging to two North Korean espionage rings. Separate raids led to the arrest of 66 others in June.

For five days in August, the police put South Korea's best-known dissident politician, Kim Dae Jung, under house arrest to keep him from attending a convention of the main opposition party.

In August, Mr. Sohn's ministry ordered local education boards to dismiss 15 elementary- and high-school teachers for writing "seditious" magazine articles. Hundreds of books and other publications have been banned as subversive.

The Education Ministry also removed Lee Hyu Jae as president of Seoul National University, South Korea's most prestigious, after he refused to expel seven student activists.

Three judges regarded as too "soft" on demonstrators were transferred from Seoul to provincial posts.

In the most recent incident, two opposition members of the National Assembly were indicted two weeks ago on charges of inciting anti-Government demonstrators at Korea University.

Alternating Toughness

For many years successive South Korean governments have alternated between relatively hard and soft policies toward political opponents, although tolerance for dissent has never been high, even in the best of times. That tendency has continued under President Chun.

When he seized control in 1980, he imposed martial law, arresting dissidents, banning hundreds of politicians and virtually forbidding any criticism of him or his policies. Over the last two years, however, some of the more stringent controls had been lifted.

Officials withdrew police officers from campuses, which are traditional havens of protest, and announced that they would return only if school administrators said demonstrations were out of control. Recently, however, the police have begun again to enter campuses to stop student protests.

University professors and journalists who had been forced out of their jobs soon after Mr. Chun took over were permitted to go back last year. Ousted college students were readmitted.

Gradually, blacklisted politicians were reinstated.

Gains by Opposition Party

Last January many of them formed the New Korea Democratic Party, a hard-line opposition force compared with its relatively tame predecessors. Only a few weeks after it came into existence the party won a surprisingly large number of seats in National Assembly elections.

The elections did not alter the true balance of power in South Korea; essentially, the legislature remains a rubber-stamp body. But its character changed. An emboldened opposition has turned it into a forum for demands for change, and Mr. Chun seems willing to allow many critical comments to appear in the regulated press.

But lately, hard-liners seem to have won out once more in the Blue House, the official presidential residence. Now, Mr. Chun seems prepared to allow criticism if it stays in the National Assembly.

Mr. Chun's critics say his policies toward dissidents keep changing because his main interest is finding ways to keep things quiet as he approaches several critical deadlines.

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This week South Korea, which has a \$45 billion foreign debt, is acting as host to a meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Next year, the Asia Games will be held in Seoul, and in 1988 the Olympic Games are to take place here. Domestic tranquillity, or the appearance of it, is essential, many South Koreans say.

"Chun has continuously failed to control South Korean politics," Kim Dae Jung said. "So now he is not confident enough to deal with our politics in a moderate way."

A Protestant clergyman put it more bluntly. "I think the Government is panicking," he said.

Rallying Point for Opposition

If Mr. Chun chooses to press the Campus Stabilization Bill, some analysts feel he could create a rallying point for disparate opposition camps.

The Government position is that the proposed law is "lenient" because it provides for reorientation, not jail or expulsion. It is "designed not to control and punish students subject to its provisions but to properly guide and protect them," an official statement said.

But even usually sympathetic people reject this argument. Among those who attacked the legislation, albeit obliquely, was the United States Ambassador, Richard L. Walker.

In remarks made in mid-August, on the anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945, the Ambassador said, "The opinions of men are not a legitimate subject for rule by civil government."